

**Dr Gina Lennox's responses to Questions from Melek Avci of JinNews
(a pro-kurdish media outlet in Turkey) re Turkey's alleged chemical bombing of HPG (PKK
Guerillas) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.**

This interview was to be conducted via Skype at the beginning of November but the Turkish State confiscated JinNews computers and arrested some of its journalists. As a result, these written answers were used to write the article.

1. Several images/videos showing the use of chemical weapons have been released since April. Should we still consider this an allegation or is Turkey really using these weapons?

A video released on October 18 showing a man having a seizure, and a woman in a state of delirium is deeply disturbing. Both the man and woman are reported to have later died. Şebnem Korur-Fincancı, Chair of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), examined the video/s and concluded that the people had been affected by toxic gasses that directly [affect] the nervous system. Ankara prosecutors immediately started investigating her for "propagandizing for a terrorist organization" and "publicly degrading the Turkish Nation, and its institutions." She has been detained since October 26.

Back in September the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) sent a team to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to investigate claims that Turkish Armed Forces were using chemical weapons when attacking PKK. According to their report "Material ... near an area abandoned by the Turkish Army included containers for hydrochloric acid and bleach, which could be used to produce chlorine, a classical chemical warfare agent."

Chemical and biological weapons expert Jan Van Aken of the IPPNW, said 'I am not in a position to say 'yes', there was a chemical attack, but I am in a position to say there is enough evidence to warrant an investigation.'" IPPNW reports have been prepared and these will be relayed to the member states of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

The HDP and imprisoned former HDP co-chair, Selahattin Demirtas, has called on the OPCW and the UN to investigate the 'incident'. (According to reports there have been over 2000 incidents since April 2022.) Unfortunately, only a OPCW member state can pursue the case in the OPCW. ¹

All that can be said is that there is enough evidence to suggest an investigation is needed into the Turkish Armed Forces having used a toxic chlorine-like nerve gas in attacking HPG/PKK guerillas in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. But before anything definitive can be claimed, we need experts to conduct an impartial investigation involving a thorough analysis

¹ Since the interview, Selahattin Demirtaş has been charged with "propagandising for a terrorist organisation" and "insulting the Turkish nation and state" over his allegation of "chemical attack."

of video footage, physical evidence, and first-hand accounts from PKK, local security forces, doctors and civilians.

2a. If Turkey does not have these weapons or does not use these weapons who does then?

I have no idea what other party would use chemicals to attack PKK guerrillas in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Turkey and the Iraqi Baathist Regime are the only actors in the region that have a history of using chemicals. Defence Minister Akar claims that the TAF “only uses tear gas” in operations in Iraq’s Mount Gara. Jan Van Aken observed, “Probably he did not know, but using tear gas in a military operation is prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention.”

2b. Where or who does Turkey get these chemicals from?

The evidence collected by the IPPNW suggest the chemical gas used to attack PKK guerillas was ‘home’ made. In Van Aken words “To me it looks like the Turkish military produces a self-made chemical agent.”

According to the IPPNW report, PKK guerrillas discovered containers of over-the-counter chemicals that can be used to manufacture chlorine gas: “containers for hydrochloric acid and bleach, which can be used to produce chlorine.”

There is no reason or evidence to suggest that a major supplier or another actor supplied the chemicals. It is very important to stick to what is apparent. Making unwarranted inferences can discredit a report or organisation.

3. On one hand, there are small settlements, villages near the conflict zones and the civilians are affected by the conflicts and must leave their villages. Put aside the political and military dimension of war, if a war crime is committed against the civilians, why do international institutions like NATO, UN and human rights watches remain silent?

I think PKK should stay away from villages and any place where civilians take their livestock to graze, or go to harvest honey. PKK being near settlements endangers civilian lives and livelihoods. Many villages are now empty because of Turkey’s attacks on PKK guerillas. This can’t go on.

I don’t think you can ever ‘put aside’ the political and military dimensions of war.

Turkey has been getting away with war crimes for more than a century. Its targeted Armenians and Kurds in Turkey, and since the 1990s, Kurds in Iraq, and since 2014, Kurds in Syria. Unfortunately for Kurds, (1) NATO is intent on keeping Turkey a member of NATO, and (2) the foundational units of the UN and other international institutions are nation-states. Many international institutions ignore non-state actors. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty, Oxfam and other humanitarian organisations are more concerned about retaining access to a country than focusing on Kurdish issues. Even those with the best intentions can fail to see Kurdish issues as internationally significant. I think most

people put Kurdish issues in the 'too hard basket'. It's up to Kurdish organisations to change these attitudes.

- 4. I would like to touch upon OPCW at this point. In 2019, in the attack in Sere Kaniye, a child had chemical burns on their body and this child was being treated in France. Following the incident, OPCW was called to investigate such incidents and OPCW announced that they would initiate an investigation. The expert investigating the case confirmed the use of white phosphorous, but then the OPCW gave up on the investigation. We talked to the institution, and they told us that they could not make an investigation unless a member state makes an application. However, in this specific incident, they first decided to take the initiative and make the investigation, but then changed their minds. I would like to ask where is the stance of OPCW in this regard? What is the reason for such a firm position?**

I do not know the details of OPCW initiating its own investigation in regards to Turkey's use of white phosphorus in Turkey used white phosphorous in its attacks on Girê Spî (Tel Abyad) and Serekani (Ras al-Ain) in northern Syria in October 2019 so I cannot comment, but it is generally known that the OPCW only takes on cases presented by an OPCW member state. You would have thought in the instance you mention that France could have presented the case to the OPCW. Perhaps the US, UK, Germany and/or NATO put pressure on the French Government not to proceed. Who knows?

In the 2022 chemical attacks we are talking about, the IPPNW is going to send its report/s to all OPCW member states. One of them would have to take up the case and present it to the OPCW, probably after a more thorough investigation. Kurdish organisations need to lobby one or more of these member states. Iraq, Greece, Belgium, Armenia or Timor Leste (given President José Manuel Ramos-Horta is sympathetic to the plight of Kurds, & knows what it's like to be without a nation state) come to mind as they are member states and may be interested in taking up the case.

List of potential countries: <https://www.opcw.org/about-us/member-states>

- 5. Iraq or Turkey cannot make an application to the OPCW. KDP itself did not allow the investigation by a European Delegation in the previous days. Well, if a state does not make an application because of its own interests, who will protect the civilians and even the warriors from the war crimes? Do you not think that this rule prevents an independent human rights struggle from being waged?**

Yes definitely I think existing international institutions and processes must change so non-state actors can hold nation states to account, and also support a population having a legal and peaceful way to change a repressive nation-state government if there are no internal means to do so. I would say that these issues, as well as issues related to ethnic and religious minority rights, are among the great challenges of the 21st century. Those in power will resist all attempts to reform international

institutions and processes. It may take decades, and it will need resources, not just a bunch of people working voluntarily.

6a. If Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) investigates the claims, the states or powers providing such weapons to Turkey could be revealed as well. This will be the case because Turkey does not have chemical weapons.

There is NO evidence to suggest that the chemical weapons were supplied by another state. The evidence suggests the ingredients could be purchased over the counter and that the chemical weapons were home-made.

6b. Is it possible to argue that maybe they do ignore the claims because of this fact? Steve Sweeney England granted Turkey 70 export licenses for the sale of white phosphorus. Even the last investigation showed that chemical weapons Turkey used are German in Origin.

Sure, European countries have supplied chemical and conventional armaments to Iraq and Turkey in the past. For example, Germany is known to have supplied Saddam Hussein's Baathist Regime the chemical weapons used for the Al-Anfal campaign against Kurds in 1988. But, to my knowledge, there is no evidence of this happening in the current circumstances.

7a. What kind of results should be expected if the use of chemical weapons is officially proved?

In this case a result will only be possible if Kurds and their organisations can get a OPCW member state to take the case to the OPCW. Thereon, I do not know what powers the OPCW has to hold a country that illegally used chemical weapons to account.

7b. What kind of sanctions can Turkey face up, or do you think that such sanctions can be applied?

Multiple sanctions can be applied if a country or group of countries have the will to do so. The USA, UK and European Union have all placed sanctions on Turkey since 2020. For instance, the US kicked Turkey out of its F-35 fighter jet programme after Turkey purchased a Russian-made missile system. Since then, the US Congress has blocked the US supplying structural upgrades for Turkey's existing F 16 fleet. The US has also frozen sales of major weapon systems like tanks, planes and ships to Turkey. The list is endless and can be easily researched. Obviously quarantining the overseas assets of Erdogan and his cronies, and not giving them entry visas to various countries would be possible. You would hope that one day the AKP-MHP government and TSK commanders would be held to account for all the atrocities against Kurds and others that they have been committed in the last three decades.

8. Do you have any action plan in your country regarding this issue?

For this and other Kurdish issues we are trying to form a non-country Australian Parliamentary Friendship Group. We write reports and letters and meet with

parliamentarians. We send some of our reports to UN country offices in Geneva, and to British and US parliamentarians. We have even been known to write to the Kurdistan Regional Government – Masoud Barzani, Nechirvan Barzani, Lahur and Qubud Talabani etc. expressing our wish for them to finalise a constitution, unite the Peshmerga, and develop transparent governance, an impartial judiciary, and a free media. We have a website on which we publish many of our activities and we have done a few humanitarian projects in Rohjelat, Rojava and Bashur. We do what we can. Unfortunately for Kurds, every day there is another catastrophe. It is so hard to act on each one. Kurds are under enormous stress 24/7. All I can say is that it is important to be sure of what you say, because the truth is powerful enough, without any embellishment.